

Statement of Senator Christopher J. Dodd  
Committee on Rules and Administration  
February 8, 2006

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this hearing to explore ways to make the legislative process fairer and more transparent. Over the years, reforms have improved the way Congress operates, including: the honoraria ban, conflict of interest rules, earned income limits, lobbying disclosure laws, the McCain-Feingold law, and others. Real reform coupled with enforcement does work.

Regulating the relationships between lawmakers and lobbyists is not new. In 1876, the House tried to require lobbyists to register, but enforcement was weak.

In the early 1930's, Congress held hearings on lobbying abuses, with little result. In 1938, the Foreign Agents Registration Act was enacted, followed by the 1946 Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act, the scope of which the Supreme Court soon narrowed. And then the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 and new Senate gift and travel rules followed. I offer this as context, and to underscore that reform is an organic process, not an event.

It is appropriate to further explore the need to reform existing lobbying laws, gift rules, earmarking and other procedures in light of recent scandals.

A number of very thoughtful reforms have been proposed and this Committee, along with the Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, are reviewing them.

The Democratic Leader, Senator Reid, has introduced a reform bill cosponsored by virtually all members of the Democratic caucus. I hope the Majority Leader will work with us to bring a comprehensive, bipartisan bill to the floor very soon. I stand ready to work with the Chairman of this Committee to expedite that process.

But I would also call on this Committee, and this Congress, to address what may be the elephant in the room: comprehensive reform of the way we organize and finance campaigns.

It is not the \$20 lunch that buys access and influence for lobbyists in Washington. It is the \$2000 per election campaign contribution.

Lobbying and gift reforms are important. But while it is clear serious reform of the way some in Congress and their lobbying allies do business is needed, these changes alone won't address the more fundamental problem: the need for campaign finance reform which breaks the link between legislative favor-seekers and the free flow of inadequately regulated, special interest private money.

This is a much more central issue than lobbying, gift and travel rules, or procedural reform. It is an issue on which I intend to focus in the coming months.

On our side, I expect a coordinated effort to press forward with campaign finance reform legislation, including reform of the Presidential system and proposals for public financing of Congressional races.

As my colleagues know, under current Supreme Court precedents, including its decision in *Buckley v. Valeo*, comprehensive reform can be accomplished either through full or partial public funding in return for a voluntary agreement by candidates to abide by spending limits. Failing that, an amendment to the Constitution to enable Congress and the states to impose mandatory spending limits is needed.

My preferred approach would be comprehensive reform to include a combination of public funding, free or reduced media time, and spending limits.

I am equally committed to seeing Congress act to respond to the lobbying scandals of recent months and to comprehensively address the role of special interest and lobbyist money in campaigns. But I believe we must move these reforms on separate and independent tracks.

Real campaign finance reform is more complex than reform of lobbying rules. We must not slow lobbying reform by tacking on unrelated campaign finance measures, which many on both sides would see as a poison pill.

Real campaign finance reform must also address the urgent need to renew and repair our Presidential public funding system, which has served Democratic and Republican candidates—and all Americans—for 25 years.

Some of us have pressed for comprehensive campaign reform for years. Current scandals offer a once-in-a-generation opportunity to address this issue in ways which both meet public demands for reform and the tests laid out by the Supreme Court since *Buckley*.

The American public is way ahead of us on this issue. Too many believe the interests of average voters are usurped by the money and influence of lobbyists, powerful individuals, corporations and interest groups. Too many believe their voices go unheard, drowned out by the din of special interest favor-seekers.

Our system derives its legitimacy from the consent of the governed. That is put at risk if the governed lose faith in the system's fundamental fairness and in its capacity to respond to the most basic needs of our society because narrow special interests hold sway over the public interest. Nowhere is the need for reform more urgent than on campaign finance.

Most Americans would agree that the price of funding campaigns with clean money, "disinterested" money, is a small price to pay to restore confidence in our system.

Comprehensive campaign finance reform, along with efforts to address the recent lobbying scandals, is necessary to return control of the process to the people to whom it belongs. That is what government of the people, by the people, and for the people means.

I welcome our colleagues and panel of witnesses to this hearing. I commend our Chairman, and others, for their thoughtful proposals and look forward to the testimony this afternoon.